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ABSTRACT

The Scale for Assessing Emotional Disturbances (SAED) is a standardized, norm-referenced scale used to identify children who qualify for the federal special education category of "emotional disturbance". It uses the five conditions on which identification of emotional disturbance is based under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act as amended in 1997. This study presents data from norming, factor analysis, and construct validity studies. The measure's subscales examine: (1) inability to learn; (2) relationship problems; (3) inappropriate behavior; (4) unhappiness or depression; (5) physical symptoms or fears; (6) social maladjustment; and (7) overall competence. The paper concludes that the SAED is well constructed and has excellent psychometric properties. It recommends the measure to: identify students with emotional disturbances; aid in the prereferral screening of large groups of students; clarify the "socially maladjusted" and "adversely affects educational performance" conditions of decision-making about emotional disturbances under the law; and select appropriate education goals for an individualized education program. (DB)

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Identifying Children with Emotional Disturbance Who Qualify for Special Education Services

Introduction

The ***Scale for Assessing Emotional Disturbance*** (SAED; Epstein & Cullinan, 1998) is a standardized, norm-referenced scale that assists in the identification of children who qualify for the federal special education category ***Emotional Disturbance***. The SAED is based on the federal terminology and definition of emotional disturbance as presented in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990, as amended in 1997. As such, the SAED addresses the five conditions on which identification of emotional disturbance is based, as well as other key features of the federal definition including assessing social maladjustment and measuring adverse educational performance. Data from the norming, factor analysis, and construct validity studies is presented.

Background

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990, and amended in 1997, is a major U.S. federal special education law that guarantees the right to an appropriate education for all children with disabilities. IDEA identified 12 varieties of disability, one of which is emotional disturbance (ED). IDEA defined ED as one of the following five characteristics: inability to learn, relationship problems; inappropriate behavior; unhappiness or depression; and physical symptoms or fears. In order for a child to be identified as ED, one or more of these characteristics has to occur over a long period of time, to a marked degree, and adversely affect educational performance.

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Although many instruments are available to professionals in assessing emotional and behavioral problems, ***none*** of these are keyed to the special considerations and characteristics found in the federal definition. Thus, the identification of ED is made more difficult because of the lack of a scale that operationalizes the definition of ED. We began to develop the SAED to provide professionals with a standardized, valid and reliable instrument to assess emotional disturbance.

Norms

In the winter and spring of 1997 efforts were made to establish norms for the SAED. Several hundred teachers, school psychologists, and counselors, nationwide, were asked to complete the SAED on students with whom they work. Two sets of normative data were collected for the SAED. One was based on students not identified with emotional disturbance (*nonED sample*) and one on students diagnosed with emotional disturbance (*ED sample*). The nonED sample included 2,266 students ranging in age from 5-0 through 18-11 years. The characteristics of the sample with regard to geographic area, gender, race, ethnicity, and educational attainment of parents were compared with 1990 data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census. The comparison indicated that the sample selection procedures resulted in a normative sample that was *representative* of the nation as a whole. The ED sample included 1,371 students ranging in age from 5-0 to 18-11 years. Based on these data three age norms (elementary school 5-0 to 11-11; junior high school 12-0 to 14-11; and high school 15-0 to 18-11) were established for each sample.

Factor Analysis

Factor analytic procedures were conducted to determine the dimensions measured by the SAED and to determine if the dimensions aligned with the federal definition of ED. First, the data set included the 2,266 nonED students. At this point the instrument consisted of 66 items (59 emotional and behavioral items and 7 competence items). An oblique factor analysis was conducted, with individual item loadings set at .40. This analysis resulted in seven factors. A few of these factors contained three items or fewer or otherwise were difficult to interpret. Then, an orthogonal (principal components) factor analysis with a varimax rotation was conducted on the data set, with the following criteria: eigenvalues greater than 1.0, individual item loadings equal to or greater than .40, and a minimum of four items in any factor. This analysis resulted in the identification of six meaningful factors. Next, several items were removed because they were redundant, overlapped with other items, or did not contribute to the factor. Forty-five items remained following this review. A final factor analysis using the principal components method with a Promax rotation was conducted and resulted in the identification of the following factors: inability to learn, relationship problems, inappropriate behavior, unhappiness or depression, physical symptoms or fears, and social maladjustment (see Table 1).

Construct Validity

One way of establishing an instrument's validity is to study the performance of different groups of individuals on the instrument. Given what is known about the relationship of the instrument's content to the group, each group's results should make sense. In the case of the SAED, one would expect that students with ED would be rated higher by adults than students without ED. Data for this study were those used in the norming process (N=2,266 nonED: N=1,371 ED). The raw scores were converted to standard scores. To test for these differences, t-tests were conducted (one for each of the subscales and one for the overall SAED score). The Bonferroni procedure was used to control for TYPE 1 error and the alpha level was set at 0.006. The ED group scored about one

Table 1
Factors and Loadings of the Items for the SAED by Subscale (decimals omitted)

Subscale		Item	Loading
Inability to Learn eigenvalue = 2.68	9.	Written expression skills (reports, essays, etc.) are poor	85
	18.	Listening and note-taking skills are weak	83
	26.	Does not independently complete assigned homework	77
	27.	Homework skills are poor	76
	34.	Gets distracted; doesn't pay attention to teachers or work	73
	35.	Mathematics skills are poor	74
	37.	Lacks interest, motivation, positive attitude toward school task	70
	43.	Reading skills are poor	79
Relationship Problems eigenvalue = 1.52	12.	Has few or no friends	86
	13.	Does not work well in group activities	61
	24.	Rejected, avoided by peers	83
	32.	Feels picked on or persecuted	53
	46.	Lacks skills needed to be friendly and sociable	78
	50.	Avoids interacting with people	65
Inappropriate Behavior eigenvalue = 17.07	10.	Disrespectful; defiant of authority	87
	11.	Cruel to peers	83
	15.	Verbally abuses, teases, or taunts people	86
	16.	Fails to consider the consequences of own acts	81
	20.	Cheats, lies, steals	71
	25.	Makes threats to others	85
	29.	Disruptive, loud, rowdy	84
	33.	Destroys and ruins things	77
	40.	Physically assaults or fights people in school	79
	49.	Uses obscene, profane, or sexually oriented language	77
Unhappiness or Depression eigenvalue = 1.00	21.	Lacks self-confidence	51
	23.	Has feelings of worthlessness	52
	28.	Experiences little pleasure or joy	61
	31.	Sad much of the time, does not smile often	57
	36.	Little or no interaction with teacher	57
	47.	No longer interested in things formerly enjoyed	44
	52.	Pessimistic about future; expresses hopelessness	59
Physical or Fears eigenvalue = 3.58	8.	Complains of physical discomfort (e.g., headaches, stomach aches)	53
	14.	Anxious, worried, tense	75
	19.	Afraid of unlikely dangers or calamities to self or others	65
	30.	Talks about suicide or own death	57
	38.	Has overtly sensitive feelings and emotions	74
	39.	Feels excessively guilty	60
	41.	Shows nervous habits (e.g., tics, bites nails, twists hair)	56
	44.	Harms own body (e.g., picks self, cuts self, writes on self)	49
Social Maladjustment eigenvalue=1.83	17.	Vandalizes property in the community	72
	22.	Takes part in illegal or antisocial gang activities	80
	42.	Abuses drugs or alcohol before or after school	64
	45.	Exhibits precocious sexual behavior	43
	48.	Runs away from home	60
	51.	Steals in the community and at home	76

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standard deviation higher than the nonED group on all the subscales and the overall score. All of the differences were statistically significant at the p =0.0001 level (see Table 2).

Summary

The SAED is well constructed and appears to have excellent psychometric properties. It has six principal uses: to identify students with ED; to aid in the prereferral screening of large groups of students; to clarify the "socially maladjusted" and "adversely affects educational performance" conditions of decision-making about ED; to select appropriate education goals for an individualized education program (IEP); to document progress toward goals as a consequence of specialized services; and to measure emotional and behavioral disorders in research and evaluation.

Reference

Epstein, M. H., & Cullinan, D. (1998). *Scale for assessing emotional disturbance.* Austin, TX: PRO-ED.

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations, *t*-test Results, and Probability Levels for non ED and ED Groups on the SAED Subscales and Quotient

SAED	Non *SED*		*ED*			
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*-test	*p*
Inability to Learn	10.00	3.00	12.53	2.94	24.28	0.0000
Relationship Problem	10.00	3.00	13.72	4.08	28.89	0.0001
Inappropriate Behavior	10.00	3.00	14.81	4.14	36.72	0.0001
Unhappiness or Depression	10.00	3.00	13.50	4.20	26.48	0.0001
Physical Symptoms or Fears	9.99	3.00	13.94	4.70	27.40	0.0001
Socially Maladjusted	10.00	3.00	14.02	6.17	22.15	0.0001
Overall Competence	10.00	3.00	7.68	2.38	25.47	0.0001
SAED Quotient	100.00	15.00	122.66	16.78	38.17	0.0001

Note: nonED = no emotional disturbance; ED = emotional disturbance